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RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 7630
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0470
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 2670
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0787
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0163
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRASILIA 001685

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IR](#) [BR](#)

SUBJECT: BRAZIL: LAYING BLAME AT THE FEET OF ISRAEL, U.S.
FOR ATTACKS IN GAZA

REF: 08 BRASILIA 896

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs Lisa Kubiske, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Brazilian government heavily criticized Israel's actions against HAMAS in Gaza, after originally suggesting it might take a more nuanced approach with its initial statements. President Lula, backed by most Brazilian media outlets, harshly criticized both Israel and the United States, and, while stressing that HAMAS bore some responsibility, minimized the group's actions. Lula, according to press reports, has instructed Foreign Minister Amorim to contact his French counterpart to organize an international conference to discuss the situation, although sources at Itamaraty would not confirm this. Protests took place today at the Israeli before they dispersed after a fight broke out among the protesters. End summary.

Criticism of Israel, U.S. and call for International
Conference

¶2. (U) After the initiation of the Israeli strikes into the Gaza strip over the weekend, the Brazilian government, through the Ministry of External Relations (Itamaraty) has issued two official statements calling on both sides of the conflict to reestablish a cease fire, and criticizing Israel for its "disproportionate" response to HAMAS rocket attacks into southern Israel from Gaza. During public remarks on December 30, President Lula criticized Israel for its excessive use of force and compared the conflict to a fight between someone holding a bomb versus someone holding matches in their hands. Lula also blasted the UN for its impotence during the crisis, but laid blame for this impotence at the feet of the United States, which, according to Lula, blocks any attempts by the international community to establish peace. Going further, Lula added that domestic politics in Israel were responsible for Israel's actions, comparing them to a supposed strategy of President Bush to win reelection by invading Iraq.

¶3. (U) Commenting on Brazil's possible role, Lula noted that it has been "proven" that the U.S. role in the Israeli-Palestine peace process has not had success, and that other countries should step in to stop the violence. In his

comments, Lula added that he had instructed Foreign Minister Amorim to contact his French counterpart to organize an international conference. News reports also indicate that Amorim contacted Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Ambassador to Brazil, to whom he committed to send humanitarian supplies to Gaza.

Israel: Hope for Change Quickly Dashed

14. (C) Israeli Charge d'Affaires Raphael Singer told poloff that the Israeli government was pleased with the original public statement put out by Itamaraty on December 27, but that subsequent declarations have proven disappointing. In the first declaration, the Brazilian government first noted its concern over HAMAS' firing of rockets into Israel before criticizing Israel's disproportionate response in a separate paragraph, a semantic change from Brazil's statements during the 2006 conflict with Hizballah in Lebanon which lumped the actions of the two sides as equivalent. Itamaraty's second statement and Lula's subsequent remarks, however, reverted back to Brazil's usual stance of playing to the UN majority by deploring Israel's disproportionate use of force and calling on an immediate ceasefire, which Singer found disappointing but not surprising. Singer also noted that the Israeli Embassy had only heard about Brazil's position through the press and that there had been no direct communication between Brazilian and Israeli governments.

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Itamaraty: We haven't changed

15. (C) According to Minister Rodrigo Amaral de Souza, chief of staff to Undersecretary for Political Affairs for Africa, Asia and the Middle East Ambassador Roberto Jaguaribe, Brazil's statements are motivated by three objectives: to reestablish the ceasefire, to allow for humanitarian assistance to go into Gaza, and get the parties back to the peace table following the process laid out at the Annapolis conference. Asked whether Brazil recognized the incongruence of asking Israel to halt its actions and return to the status quo ante knowing that HAMAS did not abide by the ceasefire in the first place, Amaral sheepishly recognized that Brazil understood Israel faced a difficult situation, but Brazil was primarily concerned that Israel's actions were threatening the progress of Annapolis and would create an irreversible momentum in a direction away from peace. Amaral also added that because Brazil has no relationship with HAMAS, it rarely addresses its actions officially. Brazil, instead maintains contact with the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah.

16. (C) Asked by poloff if Brazil had considered that it might lose credibility in Israel's eyes as a balanced peace broker with its declarations and actions, Amaral replied that Brazil's position has never changed, that Brazil has always stood fast against disproportionate use of force, has always criticized attacks against Israel, and that a successful peace must begin with recognition of Israel's right to exist. According to Amaral, "while we understand and sympathize with Israel's plight, it has been our longstanding policy, for humanitarian, legal, and practical reasons, to deplore the disproportionality of the attacks." Asked if Brazil defined proportionality in terms of deaths and wounded or number of rocket attacks, Amaral demurred, and noted that they do not count the number of deaths or rocket attacks from each side, but that it was obvious that Israel was acting in a disproportionate fashion in this case. By way of showing Brazil's balanced attitude, Amaral also highlighted President Lula's comments criticism the UN for its impotent role in establishes peace in the region. Poloff noted, however, that Lula had, in fact, blamed that impotence on the United States, but Amaral refused to comment further. Asked if

Brazil was working to organize an international conference to discuss the situation, he demurred once again, but hinted that Lula may have been more forward leaning in his remarks than Itamaraty was at that point.

Comment

¶7. (C) Brazil's initial reaction might have given reason for hope for a more balanced approach to Middle East peace issues if it had not been followed up by the usual one-sided posture of laying most of the blame at Israel and taking potshots at the U.S. for not doing more to stop Israel. The clich-laden bromides of Brazilian officials are also indicative of a lack of real understanding of the Middle East that is troubling in a government that proposes to become involved. While it is unlikely that the proposed Lula-Amorim mediation will result in anything more than political grandstanding, we will have to continue to engage Brazil at high levels (reftel) if we are to have any hope that Brazil adopts a more balanced approach, rather than simply adding their voice to the already fully-stocked anti-Israeli chorus.
KUBISKE